



## Author's response

To the Editor,

Without commenting on the statistical assumptions used by Richmond in his table, I would agree with him that pregnancy confers some important health benefits as well as risks. However, as I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> having a baby is not a pragmatic way to reduce one's risk of cancer, especially for an adolescent. Few will intentionally become pregnant while in high school to lower their

risk of ovarian cancer decades later in life. By mimicking the hormonal milieu of pregnancy, oral contraceptives allow women to enjoy some of the health benefits of pregnancy. For example, wide use of oral contraceptives by women in the United Kingdom has been associated with declining rates of ovarian cancer, despite trends toward later first births and lower total parity.<sup>2</sup>

Our goal should be to help women have healthy pregnancies when they desire them. As I pointed out in my Op-Ed piece, emergency contraception has an important role to play when primary contraception fails or is not used.

David A Grimes

Family Health International  
PO Box 13950  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709  
dgrimes@fhi.org

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References

- 1 Grimes DA, Economy KE. Primary prevention of gynecologic cancers. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 1995;172(pt 1):227-235.
- 2 Villard-Mackintosh L, Vessey MP, Jones L. The effects of oral contraceptives and parity on ovarian cancer trends in women under 55 years of age. *Br J Obstet Gynaecol* 1989;96:783-788.